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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000018

DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/TIA/ITA, DS/OPO/FPD, AND AF/E

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2019

TAGS: ASEC ER

SUBJECT: REPORTS OF GANG ACTIVITY IN ASMARA

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (SBU) Zoba regional administrative officials and Eritrean police representatives in northeast Asmara recently held a townhall meeting to discuss the rise of gang activity in Asmara. These officials stated there are over 10 gangs in Asmara, comprised of 20-30 members each, based on neighborhood or school affiliations. The original gang started from the Hadnet school, located near the Ministry of Information, approximately 1.2 miles NE of the U.S. Embassy. In addition to fighting against rival gangs, gang members have also committed robberies, assaults, and in some instances attempted extortion. The police stated one murder in Asmara has been attributed to these gangs in the last two months and the police have attempted to arrest and identify as many gang members as possible, but are hampered by limited resources. The police told the audience members it was their responsibility to prevent their children from joining these gangs and to discipline them if they get involved in any gang activity. Most gang members are between the ages of 14-16 years old. The Eritrean police do not have the resources to prosecute or hold these members and any persons caught above the age of 17 are sent to military service.

¶2. (C) Post Comments: There has been no reported gang activity in any embassy neighborhoods and to date RSO has not received any reports of Westerners being targeted by these gangs. UK Deputy Head of Mission told RSO he was aware of dual national UK/Eritreans who had been involved in gang activity in the UK and were sent to Eritrea by their parents to "straighten out." RSO has heard similar reports of other troubled dual national Eritrean youths being sent to Eritrea as well. Post has noticed an increase in crime commensurate with the declining economic conditions and lack of food in Asmara.

MCMULLEN